

The aim of Friends of Pittville is to promote greater community involvement in the enjoyment, protection, future restoration and renewal of Pittville Park and Estate.



A message from our Chair

Hello, and welcome to this our first newsletter in 2026. This year looks full of exciting potential. Firstly, the recent change of management at Cheltenham Trust promises increased outreach to community groups like ours thereby enabling fuller use of Pittville Pump Room. More details will follow as and when they become available.

Secondly, we are delighted to add, Nichola Finan has volunteered to join us on the board, taking on the duties of membership co-ordinator as well as sharing the general running of Friends of Pittville. Her work experience and skill set are a great fit!

As far as general Friends of Pittville activity is concerned there are several small projects currently in the pipeline with one or two more ideas being researched by trustees. As a team of trustees, we are working very hard on developing a new strategic plan for project work, both large and small in budget, to incorporate into our work during the next five years. We are planning to open the list of ideas to members for suggestions/feedback and to help us with prioritising the final projects that are selected. Watch your inboxes and the website for a survey offering you the opportunity to do that.

Thank you for your continued support.

John Holloway



A night of fun and fundraising at the annual Friends of Pittville quiz night

We're delighted to share that this year's Friends of Pittville Annual Quiz Night was an outstanding success! Held on Monday 16 February at The Feathered Fish, the evening brought together 72 enthusiastic quizzers, all ready to put their knowledge to the test, with resident quiz master Paul striking the perfect balance between challenge and fun.

Thanks to the wonderful support of our members, guests and generous local businesses, we are thrilled to announce that the event raised an impressive £1,072. Every penny will go towards caring for and improving the beautiful Pittville Park and surrounding areas.

The raffle was a real highlight, featuring fantastic prizes including racing tickets for Hereford and Cheltenham, a hotel stay, dinners at Prithvi and Kibou, Everyman Theatre tickets, and much more - helping us raise a significant portion of the evening's total.

Our warm thanks also go to The Feathered Fish for hosting us so generously and ensuring everything ran smoothly. To everyone who attended, donated prizes, or helped organise the evening — thank you. Your support made this our most successful quiz night yet, and we look forward to welcoming you again next year.

Louise Allerton



Green Space Volunteers

Over the last three months, I'm amazed at all that our Green Space Volunteers (GSVs) have achieved, despite mixed fortunes with the weather – which saw our numbers fluctuate from a whopping 24 one day to four damp souls on a wet and chilly morning. We have pruned, weeded, cleared and mulched with enthusiasm and welcomed several new folk to our ranks.

Tree removal and replanting

As well as seeing many new young trees being planted by Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), you may have noticed the tree surgeons at work recently: a programme of necessary works scheduled following last summer's detailed safety inspection by Senior Tree Officer Chris Chavasse. Having spent time with Chris in my new role as GSV Coordinator, I know he doesn't remove so much as a twig without good reason, but following recent hot summers, more trees than usual have died or are in rapid decline. In a few cases, a tree has been removed to give its neighbour the space needed to thrive. Additionally, the storm on the evening of 8 January brought down the Pencil Cedar (actually a juniper) near the Pump Room. This tree was on the register of champion trees for being the tallest of its kind and will be missed.

Yet this period of loss has also been matched by renewed planting efforts. I recently joined Chris to plant a new Douglas fir tree at the Wellington Road end of Pittville Lawn to replace one that had died. And on a rare sunny day this February, GSVs were joined by the CBC rangers, Cheltenham Town Wheelers, Cheltenham Tree Group and a couple of students from the University to plant trees across the west side of Pittville Park and Tommy Taylors Lane. Adding to the various copses already created on the area, the trees were provided by Cheltenham Tree Group and funded by Friends of Pittville. This brings to mind the quote: *'Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.'*



Bridge repairs and next steps for Albert Rd

Before Christmas, a stone mason was engaged to carry out repairs to the bridge near the Albert Road entrance to the park. He did a great job and was very generous with his time and knowledge about how the volunteers can help with the prevention of water ingress to the bridge. I also had a meeting in January to discuss the Albert Road development with CBC's Adam Reynolds, Green Space Manager, and Marta Cowling, public realm and landscape architect. Some stone edging material has been procured, and a planting plan has been drawn up. CBC will provide the plants and the GSVs will do the rest.

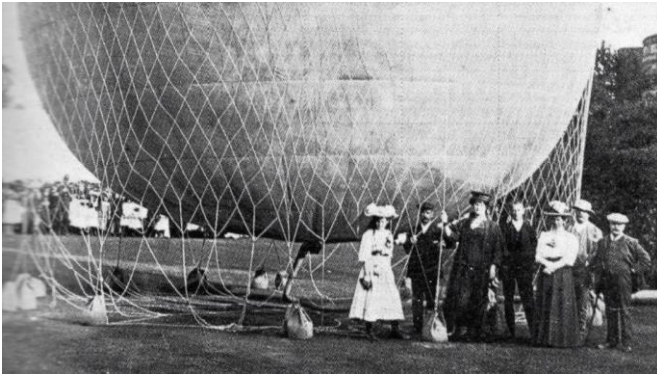
Preparation for the Green Flag inspection

We were pleased to receive a great write up from the Green Flag Award mystery visitor. In preparation for this year's full inspection, and as part of the ongoing management plan for the park, two 'working walks' were carried out with CBC's Steve Mason, Community Parks Officer, and Lucy Wise, Community Ranger. We were also joined by former GSV Coordinator, Chris Archibald, who was able to share his wealth of experience. The purpose of these walks was to review progress against the plan and agree tasks for GSV and UBICO, which has helped us shape the priorities for GSV going forward.

As always, grateful thanks to our smashing team of volunteers, a warm welcome to our newest members and welcome back to Malcolm and Caro, who are back on duty looking after the area around Pittville Gates! If you would like to join our merry throng, we meet on the first and third Thursdays of the month, 09.15-11.15 am, meeting up by the aviaries above the playground. Email: volunteer@friendsofpittville.org.uk.

Barbara Leigh





Emily de Voy: Britain's first female parachutist and her leap into Pittville

You may be surprised to learn that Pittville Park was once the stage for a remarkable moment in aviation history. In 1889, a young woman named Emily de Voy (also recorded as Emma Dovey) made what is recognised as the first parachute descent by a woman in Britain. Her historic jump took place here in Cheltenham, launched from a hot-air balloon and witnessed by crowds who had never before seen a woman attempt such a daring feat.

Emily's route into parachuting was far from ordinary. Born into poverty, she grew up in challenging circumstances before becoming involved in ballooning displays through her brother-in-law, the professional balloonist George Higgins, a well-known aeronaut and parachute showman of the late Victorian era. Together, Emily and George performed parachute demonstrations across the country, but her first recorded jump on 4 May 1889 in Pittville Park is the one that secured her place in the history books as Britain's pioneering female parachutist.

This extraordinary achievement makes Pittville Park an important site in the story of British aviation — yet until now, this chapter has remained largely unmarked. Friends of Pittville, working in partnership with The Cheltenham Civic Society, are now planning to put that right. Together, we will be commissioning a permanent plaque, to be installed in late summer 2026, commemorating Emily de Voy's groundbreaking leap.



The new plaque will make a fascinating pairing with the existing green plaque in Montpellier Gardens,



Image credit: Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic, and Pittville History Works

which marks the first successful parachute descent by a British man, John Hampton, achieved on the 2 October 1838. By bringing Emily's story to light with a plaque in Pittville Park, we aim to celebrate not only her daring feat but also the contribution of women to early aviation. We look forward to sharing more details as the unveiling approaches.

The full story of Emily's life and her parachute descent in Cheltenham, along with the stories of other British women pioneers in different areas of aviation, is available in Sally Smith's book '*Magnificent Women and Flying Machines.*'

Louise Allerton



Join us for an evening of art in Wellington Square

Saturday 18 April, 6.00–8.30pm
Tickets: £20 per person

We're delighted that Friends of Pittville member **Jenny Ogle** is opening her lovely Wellington Square home for a special early-evening soirée.

The event includes a talk by local historian **Dr Steven Blake**, '*A Tale of Two Terraces: Clarence Square West and Wellington Square West*', followed by the chance to explore two floors of fascinating fine art, sculpture and designer furniture.

Enjoy beautiful live music from young local musicians **Dalia (flute)** and **Manon (harp)** as you browse. **Canapés and wine/soft drinks** are included in the ticket price.

Tickets on sale now at: friendsofpittville.org.uk



Build your own bug hotel

Friends of Pittville worked with Men in Sheds to build two bug hotels for the Sensory Garden, and they've already become lively homes for insects. Creating one at home is simple and can provide safe nesting spaces for insects that are not only charming to observe but also incredibly helpful to the garden. Solitary bees, which are highly efficient pollinators, make use of hollow tubes and drilled logs. Ladybirds and lacewings contribute natural pest control by feeding on aphids, and beetles help with decomposition, enriching the soil. By assembling materials that mimic natural crevices, stems, and sheltered pockets, we can create thriving microhabitats that encourage more insect life.

To build your own, start with a wooden crate, box or old drawer as the frame. Fill it with a mix of natural materials such as bamboo canes or hollow stems, logs with drilled holes, pinecones, bark, twigs, straw, leaves or rolled cardboard. The aim is to create lots of small shelters and tubes. You don't need many tools, just a drill or secateurs if you have them. Once the materials are packed tightly enough to stay in place, add a waterproof top such as a roof tile or piece of slate to protect the interior.

Choose a sunny, sheltered position, ideally facing south or southeast, and raise the hotel slightly off the ground. Stability is important, so put it somewhere it won't need moving. Through the warmer months, bees may begin nesting in the tubes, while ladybirds and lacewings look for cosy spots later in the year. During winter the structure becomes a refuge for hibernating insects, so avoid disturbing it. A light refresh in late winter – removing anything that has become mouldy – is usually all the maintenance required.

You can make your bug hotel an attractive feature by adding a small sign, painting the frame with non-toxic colours or planting nectar-rich flowers such as lavender or thyme nearby to draw in pollinators. With a few simple materials and a little imagination, your own bug hotel will soon become a welcoming refuge for the insects that keep your garden thriving.

Louise Allerton



Music on the bandstand!

We are pleased to announce that summer 2026 will see a return of live music to the Pittville Park Bandstand! With a grant from CBC and some of our own funds, Friends of Pittville will be supporting and hosting a series of concerts featuring major silver and brass bands. Concerts are provisionally booked for five Sundays: 1.00-3.00pm on 21 June, 19 July, 2 August, 9 August and 16 August. We hope the weather will be kind and that you will come and join us; bring a picnic and meet your friends there. Keep an eye on the website or Facebook page for confirmation of dates and bands. In the event of bad weather we hope to move the music to the covered colonnade at the front of the Pump Room.

Andy Hopkins



Annual Plant Sale

Saturday 2 May, 10.00am –12.00pm

We are pleased to announce the Friend's of Pittville annual plant sale will be taking place in front of the scout's hut on Central Cross on the 2nd of May, 2026. This will see a number for nurseries in attendance along with plant donation from our members and is a key part of our fundraising calendar. Further details will follow, but please do save the date.



Editor: Louise Allerton

Website: friendsofpittville.org.uk

Registered charity number:

1146790